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USDA ACTS TO PROVIDE ASSISTANCE TO NEW ENGLAND STORM VICTIMS

WASHINGTON, Jan. 13, 1998--Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman announced today that USDA is responding decisively to the need for disaster assistance in New England states hit by last week's severe winter storms.

"Our top priority is to help the people of upstate New York and northern New England who were directly affected by the ravages of these ice storms," said Glickman. "We responded quickly to requests for emergency food assistance and help to dairy farmers in the worst-hit areas, and we will continue to provide aid to those in need."

Glickman said that employees from USDA's Food and Nutrition Service, Farm Service Agency, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service are on-site and working closely with federal, state, and local officials in New York, Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont.

USDA's Food and Nutrition Service, at the request of the New York Office of General Services, has begun a 3-day food distribution program to households in Jefferson County, NY, to assist about 3,000 families affected by the severe storms. Approximately 7,500 cases of commodities valued at \$99,000 were delivered to 13 Jefferson County food pantries on Jan. 12, for distribution to area households. Four additional New York counties covered by the Presidential disaster declaration have not yet indicated the need for disaster food assistance.

In Maine, USDA is providing food to the American Red Cross for use in congregate meal service for those displaced from their homes by the storms. USDA food that is in stock from on-going nutrition assistance programs like the National School Lunch Program is used in disaster situations to provide quick access to food for those in need. The food used is replaced by USDA when the need for emergency assistance has ended.

Glickman said that Farm Service Agency personnel are working in affected states as part of local community Emergency Management Boards to assess damage and match scarce resources to critical needs. The most critical agricultural need is getting electrical generators to dairy farms suffering power outages and that rely on electricity to milk their cows. Missed milkings can cause animal health problems and losses. In Minnesota, FSA personnel are coordinating National Guard shipments of generators from the Midwest to New England to meet emergency power needs.

There are widespread reports of ice damage to fruit trees and to maple (syrup) trees. In addition, some milk has been dumped because tank trucks could not get through the storms to make pick-ups. Some milk has been rejected at processing plants because adequate cooling temperatures could not be maintained on the farm.

In areas where there is a disaster declaration in place, USDA can make loans under the Emergency Loan Program for production losses, and loans for replacing buildings and other property losses caused by the storms. In addition, Farm Service Agency borrowers can have one year of payments deferred until the end of their loans.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service is conducting damage surveys to provide assistance under USDA's Emergency Watershed Protection program. The program helps protect lives and property threatened by natural disasters. It is administered by NRCS, which provides technical and financial assistance to preserve life and property threatened by flooding and excessive erosion.

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